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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER GOVERNOR ON POLITICAL CLIMATE IN THE NORTH

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 31, former military governor serving under Sani Abacha, Retired Captain Rufa'i Garba, offered his take on the political climate in the North ahead of April's elections. An astute political observer, Garba averred that the arrest of Vice President Atiku Abubakar might, at least temporarily, garner him support in the North. Garba also believed that the PDP's selection of the weak Umaru Yar'Adua strengthens the hand of the North's favored son, Muhammadu Buhari. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Captain Rufa'i Garba, former military Governor of Sokoto and Anambra States under Sani Abacha, told PolOffs that the Northern elite was concerned with the President's treatment of Vice President Atiku Abubakar. Garba said that the perception that Atiku was being unfairly persecuted would serve to rally support to his side, in spite of his limited popularity in the North. If Atiku were to be arrested upon his return to Nigeria, Garba contended, there would be a unified stance in his support. Garba also intimated that there was general support for the principle that Atiku should be allowed to contest for the presidency, although Buhari enjoyed much more support in the region.

¶3. (C) Garba also said that he thought Babangida's run at the presidency had been at best half-hearted. Garba, who also served under Babangida and keeps in close contact, said that many of Babangida's former associates in the Northern elite had pressured him to run. He added that Babangida did not feel he could turn down the entreaties, so he made a rather pro-forma effort mainly for show. He said that Babangida remained politically active, primarily behind closed doors.

¶4. (C) Garba also said that the PDP's choice of Umaru Yar'Adua played into the hands of Buhari, who is the most popular Northern candidate. Buhari, who also hails from Katsina State, would win Katsina and the rest of the North by a huge margin, and depending on his running mate, would be competitive in the rest of the country, he posited.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Though retired, Rufa'i Garba remains politically active and plugged in to the political sentiments of the elite and the people. His observations track with media reports, but are also gleaned from personal contact with some of the players involved. END COMMENT.
CAMPBELL